



CITY OF FLINT

Dayne Walling

Mayor

September 13, 2013, 2013

TESTIMONY FROM MAYOR DAYNE WALLING (CITY OF FLINT)

Senate Economic Development Committee

Sen. Mike Kowall, Chair

Place: St. Luke's NEW Life Center, Flint, MI

Dear Mr. Chairman and Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to welcome you to the City of Flint as you look at economic development all across the great State of Michigan.

An exciting transformation is taking place in Flint. While known as a manufacturing center, Flint is establishing itself as a new kind of college town, a destination for medical sector companies, an intermodal and international hub for trade and transportation, and a center of innovation. With strong private-sector leadership, talented young entrepreneurs, institutional investments, and public sector collaboration, we are changing as profoundly today as a hundred years ago when Flint was becoming an industrial powerhouse.

Through our comprehensive master planning process—the first in more than 50 years—we imagine Flint as a city with a growing and diverse 21st Century economy that spurs innovation and small business development and prepares our workforce for jobs that offer a livable wage and sustains a community with opportunity for all. The proposed plan has been posted for the required circulation period and is available online. A summary of the key themes, goals, objectives and strategies is attached, “City of Flint Master Plan Economic Development and Education Summary.”

We are working hard every day to retain, attract and grow businesses right here in Flint, Genesee County, and along the I-69 International Trade corridor throughout Mid-Michigan. Recent announcements include a new building downtown with four small businesses, a new housing development from a former school building, the expansion of the YouthBuild program at the City's business incubator, continued business growth at Diplomat Specialty Pharmacy, a new central health facility, and GM capital investments and energy efficiency improvements in their production facilities.

In the coming months, we are looking forward to new business investments to redevelop the former Buick City site, to new jobs being added right here at St. Luke's NEW Life center, and greater regional planning efforts through U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration funds and the new State Regional Prosperity Initiative.

The data tells us that despite our challenges, Flint is the heart of a growing regional Mid-Michigan economy. For example, while Flint's residential population continues to decline—a trend we want to reverse—the City already has a growing daytime population as a regional employment center with more than 30,000 net individuals here working. This creates opportunities for housing and retail expansion, so we are requesting you look at regulations and programs that will support mixed-use development and redevelopment—so this includes everything from demolition funding to mezzanine financing tools for MSHDA.

Our growing regional importance also an implication for revenue policies. Many of the growing institutions are medical and educational non-profits, so we can not rely on property taxes to maintain services for their growing number of employees, students, patients and customers. Please consider this and weigh in on Flint's proposal for an expanded local income tax like Grand Rapids did a few years ago when they realized the same predicament.

We also want to do everything we can to connect these growing opportunities with our current and projected Flint workforce which is facing significant challenges with under-achievement, illiteracy, and unemployment. This is why we are addressing economic development and education in an integrated way in our master plan. Economic development is human development.

As a member of the MEDC Executive Committee I am fortunate to participate in the strategy development that is supporting our state's economic development. MEDC is developing and implementing effective new approaches that are outcome based, and these approaches are rapidly proving themselves. One example is the Community Ventures program, targeted at four communities in Michigan, including Flint.

Community Ventures is focused on providing sustainable jobs for our hardest to employ. The employer is the customer, so resources are focused on market need. The program is providing wrap around services to develop a pool of workers for real employment opportunities. You'll hear more about the Community Venture program in the MEDC's presentation, but I am delighted that Flint's residents are finding jobs and a future through the Community Ventures program, a partner with St. Luke's in rebuilding our community. I am advocating for increased and more flexible State and Federal workforce funds to make sure we are putting funds where they can do the most for our families, businesses and communities.

Economic development and education will form the foundation of the future Flint and there will need to be multisector alignment and substantial investments in people, places, and planning to achieve the vision. We need to continue to work together to connect agriculture and manufacturing, jobs to workers, and economic growth to community prosperity.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dayne Walling", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dayne Walling
Mayor, City of Flint